

WELL-CHILD EXAM PILOT PROJECT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**A Joint Project by:
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Department of Health,
State Board of Health, and Department of Social and Health Services**

Summary of Intent

The purpose of this pilot project was to examine the benefits and burdens to schools and parents of a possible requirement that all children have a comprehensive well-child exam prior to entering school.

Methods

Thirteen schools from 12 school districts participated. These schools had 852 students entering kindergarten. The schools asked parents and guardians of new kindergartners to return completed well-child exam forms and to complete surveys about well-child exams. They could fill out an exemption form for the well-child exam. A total of 399 exams (47 percent response rate) and 266 parent surveys (31 percent response rate) were returned. School nurses reviewed the exam forms, compiled data, and completed Nurse Summary Reports. Their reports detailed referrals and accommodations, whether exams were complete, time spent on the project, and other data.

Conclusions

- Many school districts, school nurses, and parents demonstrated a relatively low level of enthusiasm for required well-child exams. Nearly half (48 percent) of the school districts that were asked to participate declined. Of the school nurses that participated, 58 percent felt well-child exams should not be required. Concerns included staff time, fiscal impacts, and creating a barrier to school attendance.
- Health care providers made 86 referrals and schools made 23 classroom accommodations. Some children had more than one referral and/or accommodation. It is not known how many of these referrals and accommodations would have been made without the exam requirement.
- Sixty percent of the exam forms that were returned had missing elements.
- Due to the low response rate for both the exams (47 percent) and the surveys (31 percent), results may not apply to the parents who did not respond. Caution should be exercised in basing policy decisions on data from this project.

Recommendations

Nothing in the study bears on any health justification for well-child screenings. Likely benefits were observed in the number of accommodations and referrals. The authors recommend against implementing a requirement based on the approach explored by this pilot. The burdens identified in this study would make successful implementation unlikely at this time. Entities such as the State Board of Health and American Academy of Pediatrics recommend comprehensive well-child exams to ensure that school children are healthy and have the best opportunity to learn. Health care providers, schools, and parents each have significant roles to play in order to improve the number of children who receive well-child exams. Our agencies will continue to collaborate to promote comprehensive well-child exams prior to school entry, as well as access to health care for children.